ANDROID™

NETRUNNER™

THE CARD GAME

AN EXCERPT FROM

FREE FALL

She touched her keypad and the empty wall behind her turned into a floor-to-ceiling vidscreen, high-def, like looking into another room right next door, except that Dawn's office was eat-off-the-carpet clean; the vid image looked like the inside of a slaughterhouse. There was even blood on the walls and ceiling.

Low-G can do that. The body, about half of it on the blood saturated bed and the rest scattered around the room, had been taken apart by something big and hot.

"Who is it?" I frowned, then corrected myself. "Who was it?"

"Roger Mayhurst Dow. Lawyer…and political lobbyist."

"Um. For whom?"

"Humanity Labor."

"Frag."

Them again. I could understand now why the Commissioner wanted a good forensics specialist up there. If Humanity Labor was involved, we were going to need to dot every I and cross every T, because they'd slap you with a lawsuit just for looking at them funny. Litigious bastards.

"Looks like it was personal," I said. "Or someone really doesn't like lawyers."

She tapped out something on her keyboard, and the image on the screen swung to the right, angled down, and zoomed in on something that looked like a military BFG, but wasn't. Military hardware, even of the Big Fraggin' Gun variety, tends to be a tad more discriminating.

I leaned forward to read the fine print embossed on the murder weapon's muzzle. "Alpha Prospecting," I read aloud. It was as I'd thought. "A mining laser. So we're looking for a disgruntled miner," I said. I frowned. "Or a disgruntled mining clone…"

"Maybe. But it took some sophisticated electronics knowledge to bypass Beanstalk security on this one. How the hell did someone smuggle a mining laser up there into an orange-sec zone? Especially if he was a clone?"

She tapped the side of her neck. "Tracking tag."

"So the miner had help?"

"Had to be. Someone with some very serious hacking skills."

"Great. That narrows it down to…what? Maybe five, six million jack-hackers in Earthside New Angeles alone? A few thousand more in Heinlein?"

She click-clacked out another combination of characters on her keyboard. "It's making us look very carefully at one in particular…"

The bloody crime scene vanished, replaced by a larger-than life-sized image of a kid. I say "kid," but his bio said he was twenty-two. He looked young, though, with the sullen expression and the casual BDSM leatherwear of the self-made anti-authoritarian rebel.

Height one-eighty, green hair, a face full of piercings. He wore eyeglasses, but I knew his vision was G-mod perfect, and the glasses were projection screens for some fairly sophisticated personal electronics.

Yeah, I knew Ji Reilly—"Noise," as he preferred to be called. Boy genius, probably the hack behind the Stuckey IT incident a couple of years back, but no one could ever prove it. I'd been on that case—a slick identity theft that had made half a million dollars vanish from a fat business account with no IP trace and no electron trails.

She switched off Reilly's image and turned to face me. "Listen hard, Harrison. The Clone Riots last year left everybody on edge, and there were those rumors last month about android conspiracies. The damned city's about ready to explode. The Feds are watching, and they're just itching to invoke the Accord. If Mayor Wells is forced to declare martial law, the Feds are going to be on our tails like sand at the beach.

You follow me?"

"Yeah. A little too well."

"I want a conviction, Harrison. And I do not want more dead clones in the streets."

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